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I AM THE MASTERMIND!

Danganronpa Fanzine



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

- Page 1 >>> Hajime Hinata
- Page 3 >>> Makoto Naegi
- Page 4 >>> Shuichi Saihara
- Page 5 >>> "Lottery #145"
- Page 7 >>> Kaede Akamatsu
- Page 8 >>> "Mobius Game"

CHAPTER 1

- Page 13 >>> Leon Kuwata
- Page 15 >>> Sayaka Maizono
- Page 16 >>> "Audience of One"
- Page 18 >>> Imposter
- Page 19 >>> "Metamorphosis"
- Page 22 >>> Rantaro Amami

CHAPTER 2

- Page 23 >>> Peko Pekoyama
- >>>>>>> Fuyuhiko Kuzuryuu
- Page 25 >>> Chihiro Fujisaki
- Page 26 >>> Mondo Dowada
- Page 27 >>> Mahiru Koizumi
- Page 28 >>> "Aperture"
- Page 32 >>> Ryoma Hoshi
- Page 33 >>> Kirumi Tojo
- Page 34 >>> "For Everyone But You"

CHAPTER 3

- Page 37 >>> Byakuya Togami
- >>>>>>> Celestia Ludenberg
- Page 39 >>> Hiyoko Saionji
- Page 40 >>> Mikan Tsumiki
- Page 41 >>> Ibuki Mioda
- Page 43 >>> Tenko Chabashira
- Page 44 >>> Korekiyo Shinguuji
- Page 45 >>> Angie Yonaga
- Page 46 >>> Kiyotaka Ishimaru

CHAPTER 4

- Gundham Tanaka >>> Page 47
- Nekomaru Nidai >>> Page 49
- Sakura Ogami >>> Page 50
- Gonta Gokuhara >>> Page 51
- "Swarm Over All" >>> Page 52
- Miu Iruma >>> Page 54

CHAPTER 5

- Kaito Momota >>> Page 55
- Kokichi Ouma >>>>>>>
- "Theatre of Cruelty" >>> Page 57
- Nagito Komaeda >>> Page 62
- Chiaki Nanami >>> Page 63
- Mukuro Ikusaba >>> Page 64
- "Abysmal Devotion" >>> Page 65

CHAPTER 6

- Aoi Asahina >>> Page 67
- Toku Fukawa >>> Page 69
- Kyoko Kirigiri >>> Page 70
- "Mens Rea" >>> Page 71
- Kazuichi Souda >>> Page 75
- Himiko Yumeno >>> Page 76
- Yasuhiro Hagakure >>> Page 77
- "The Fool" >>> Page 78
- Maki Harukawa >>> Page 79
- Akane Owari >>> Page 80
- "Tenderize" >>> Page 81
- Sonia Nevermind >>> Page 83
- KI-BO >>> Page 84

EPILOGUE

- Monokuma Theatre Break >>> Page 85
- DRI Mastermind Class >>> Page 87
- SDR2 Mastermind Class >>> Page 88
- DRV3 Mastermind Class >>> Page 89
- Execution Grand Finale >>> Page 90
- Merch Lineup >>> Page 91
- Curtain Call >>> Page 97

PROLOGUE







LOTTERY

#145

Danganronpa never skimps with theatrics; that's why its waiting public adored it. Shuichi, personally, would've rather died than miss an episode — if there was an execution, he would tape it too, because the executions were the best part. He watched them slowed down, drinking in every detail of their wide eyes and contorted limbs, screaming that tilted into a decrescendo. A notepad of theories teetering on his knee, a chip bag in his lap.

His thoughts repeated like song lyrics. *That plan would've never worked. What were they thinking? If I was them — if I was on Danganronpa —*

That was barely a few months ago. Shuichi knows that his mind is tricking him when it tells him it's been much longer. The newest version of him is instead standing alone in the control room — his control room — trailing his hands idly over a glaring TV. He tries to feel that excitement again, the tickling in his stomach like butterflies — and he fails. The CRT gives a loud buzz as Kaito's execution loops on the screen.

Being selected for *Danganronpa* is a big deal. But being selected to be the mastermind is an honor bigger than any award, than any cash prize, because the mastermind can mold the entire season — so when *Danganronpa* told him their season twist, that he would be both the protagonist and the mastermind, Shuichi was frothing at the mouth with excitement. He crafted this season perfectly: Kaede as the first protagonist, determined right up until her death. Him as the second, a marvelous character arc that would lead everyone to depend on him. Then, at the last moment, the protagonist would switch to KI-B0 when Shuichi revealed himself as the puppet master. He holds that twist with inappropriate pride. Nobody would suspect a triple protagonist switch off.

That's how it was supposed to be, and yet — it was an understatement to say things hadn't been going to plan. The fifth trial had him scrambling to figure out who had been crushed under that hydraulic press. There had been no footage from the hangar, and his fist was still bruised from when he punched his desk in frustration. Up until the end, he struggled to make sense of everything.

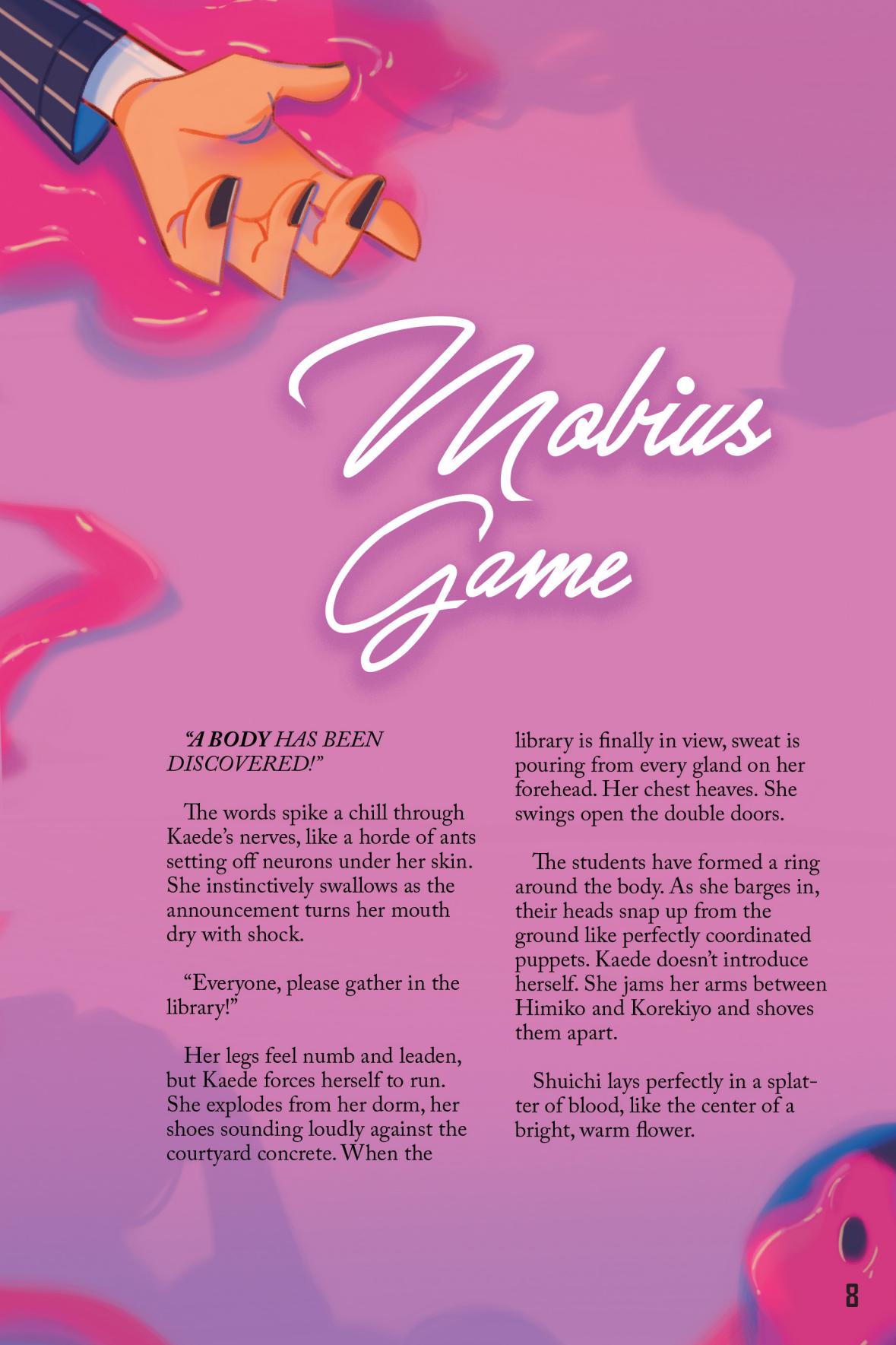
The screen in front of him cycles through Kaito's impassioned plea, words as lively as the blood that pours from his mouth. Maki crumbles her usual stone-faced demeanor and weeps openly as Shuichi stands nearby, his expression dark, his posture stiff. As Kaito dies, Shuichi quite suddenly remembers laying on the grass together with him, staring at the stars. His body limps as KI-B0 wrenches him away from the rocket plummeting back to Earth.

On-screen, Shuichi's scripted lines come out verbatim, but there's little confidence in them. Kaito's last words still boom in his memory: "My friends aren't going to lose to you! End this ridiculous killing game!" All he can do is laugh.

Kaito's execution replays; Shuichi watches with dry eyes. He reminds himself that Kaito wasn't a real person. He tells himself he has succeeded. He tells himself he is happy.

Shuichi turns off the screen.

Henkiry ♡ AUTHOR
Trace ♡ ILLUSTRATOR



***"A BODY HAS BEEN
DISCOVERED!"***

The words spike a chill through Kaede's nerves, like a horde of ants setting off neurons under her skin. She instinctively swallows as the announcement turns her mouth dry with shock.

"Everyone, please gather in the library!"

Her legs feel numb and leaden, but Kaede forces herself to run. She explodes from her dorm, her shoes sounding loudly against the courtyard concrete. When the

library is finally in view, sweat is pouring from every gland on her forehead. Her chest heaves. She swings open the double doors.

The students have formed a ring around the body. As she barges in, their heads snap up from the ground like perfectly coordinated puppets. Kaede doesn't introduce herself. She jams her arms between Himiko and Korekiyo and shoves them apart.

Shuichi lays perfectly in a splatter of blood, like the center of a bright, warm flower.

All at once, exhaustion overpowers her; her knees hit the floor beside him. She wants to muster some kind of noise but finds she can't. Her lungs are drained of air. She reaches out - Shuichi's hand is like ice. His eyes are half-opened and dull, his skin beginning to gray.

"Upupupu!" Monokuma's robotic voice blares. "That's right, folks! Shuichi Saihara, the Ultimate Detective, is —"

"Who did this?!" Kaede's scream splices through the air. Monokuma falls silent beside her, his eerie half-grin plastered on his face. She turns around, and on cue, the entire student body careens to avoid her eyes.

Kaede grits her teeth. "Who did this?" She asks again, miserably knowing that she won't receive a genuine answer. Everybody reacts

as she expects: Kaito bristling in preparation for another outburst; Tenko wrapping her arms around Himiko, who has trained her eyes on the floor; Kirumi twisting her gloves despite her poker face.

Rantaro touches her shoulder.



Kaede was one of the last three survivors of the 53rd killing game. When the globe that contained them collapsed, the Future Foundation dug through the rubble and rescued her. Himiko and Maki also survived, but they all migrated to different areas after being recruited. Kaede couldn't remember the last time she had even met them. The real them.

It was a few months after the tragedy when the Foundation conducted an investigation into Miu's supercomputer, and they found the AIs were recoverable. That code held the personalities of her fallen friends.

That day, Kaede slid one of the programmers an envelope thick with cash, and asked them a single request. "I want to reset the killing game." The programmer was hesitant, but complied. They pulled the AIs from that computer and reformatted them, set their personalities back to the beginning, back when they had all first met. When they were full of hope.

Kaede placed the VR helmet on her head, a mixture of dread and giddiness building in her stomach. She would be able to reenact the killing game - she would be able to rest once she finally knew how to save everybody.

This was the 44th rerun.

She wonders how much time had passed in reality. In the virtual world, months had already passed.



"Don't say anything!" She jabs a finger at Kokichi the moment he opens his mouth. "This isn't a joke! Shuichi's — he's dead!" The corners of her eyes relent to the sting, the tears starting to flow. She turns away before she can see whatever expression Kokichi makes at her.

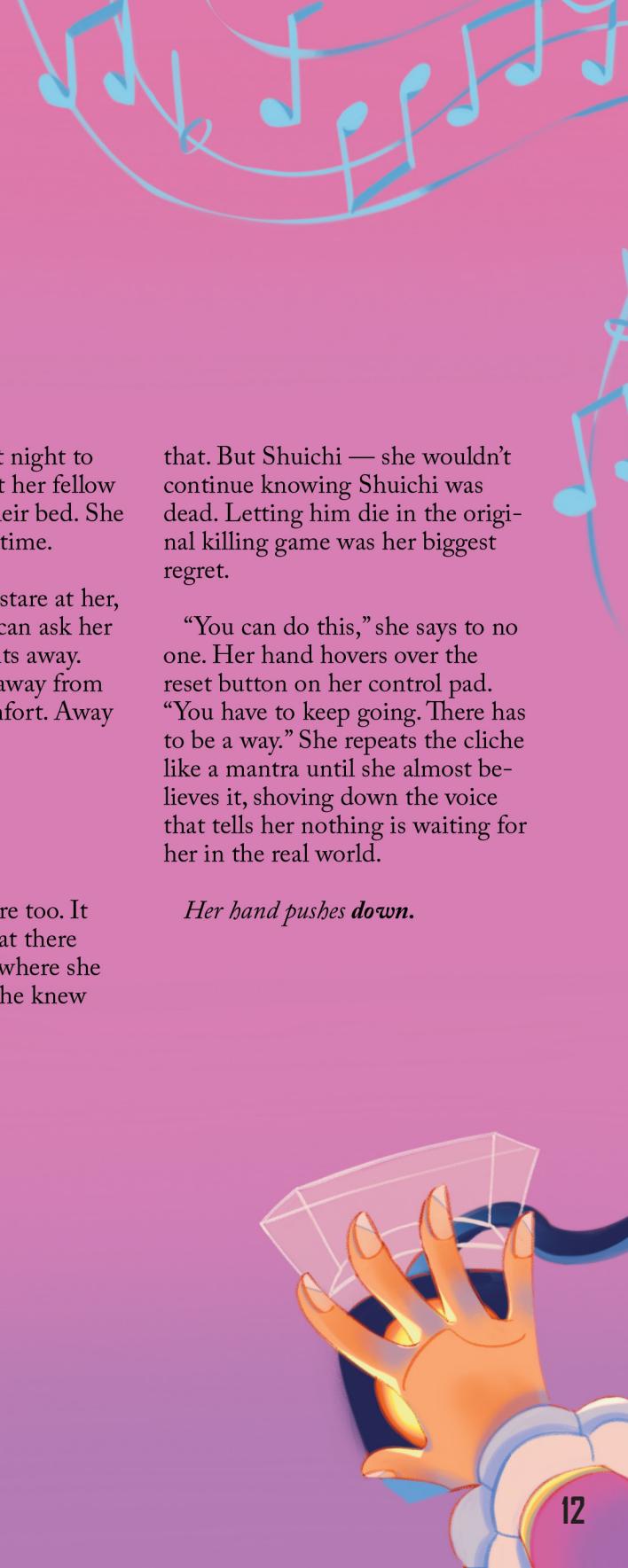




“Kaede,” Rantaro says softly. “Let’s get away from the body first, okay?”

“No!” Her voice comes as a hoarse shriek as she swats his hand away. She somehow props herself back up onto her legs, and her voice cranks up an octave. “I’m so sick of this! We said we wouldn’t play this game! We promised each other!! How many more times — how much longer are you guys going to kill each other? Isn’t this enough?!”

Her body feels electrified. She remembers every trial beforehand with clarity, the way she scrambled to hide all the sharp and blunt objects, the way she double bolt locked the gym entirely, the way



she snuck into rooms at night to steal away weapons that her fellow classmates hid under their bed. She thought she had it this time.

The other classmates stare at her, perplexed. Before they can ask her any questions, she sprints away. Away from the others, away from the canned lines of comfort. Away from Shuichi’s body.



This rerun was a failure too. It was entirely possible that there wouldn’t be a situation where she could save everybody. She knew

that. But Shuichi — she wouldn’t continue knowing Shuichi was dead. Letting him die in the original killing game was her biggest regret.

“You can do this,” she says to no one. Her hand hovers over the reset button on her control pad. “You have to keep going. There has to be a way.” She repeats the cliche like a mantra until she almost believes it, shoving down the voice that tells her nothing is waiting for her in the real world.

Her hand pushes down.



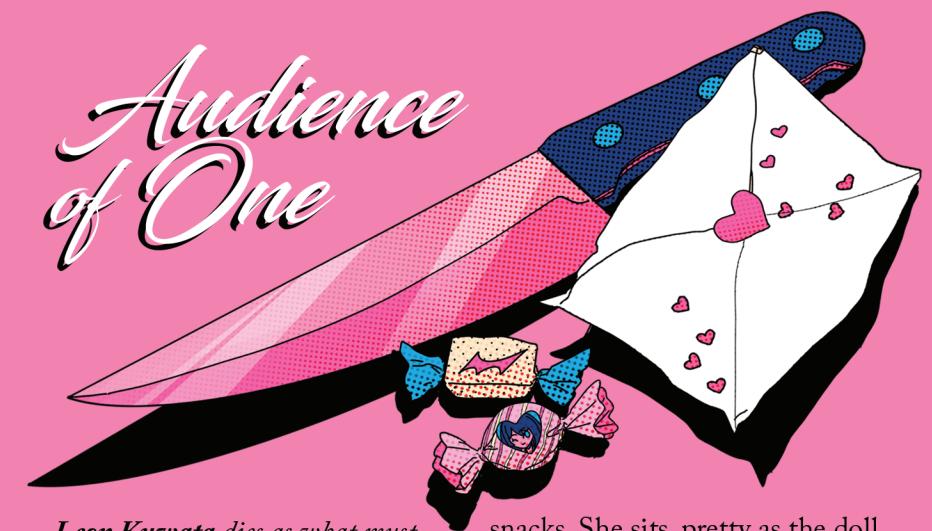


CHAPTER 1

SURVIVING DESTINATION DESPAIR: OUR CLASS TRIAL



Audience of One



Leon Kuwata dies as what must be the thousandth ball hits his skin, and Sayaka Maizono thinks she could laugh so hard until she cries with absolute glee.

There's something ironic about it in the twisted way only some could understand the appeal of. The first victim — that is to say, the first "victim" — sits twenty or so floors away from the execution, surrounded by TV screens and computer monitors, her own merch and scattered

snacks. She sits, pretty as the doll she's always been, as the live feed shows her "killer" finally (finally! god, it took people so long to *die*, didn't it?) take one last battered breath.

In another world, maybe he wouldn't be the first killer in a pink-stained sea of entertainment.

She can hear it now, the thought that's been planted in everyone's heads — poor, *sweet*, Sayaka, who was a victim of circumstance and nothing else. Poor, sweet, stupidly *ditzy* Sayaka, who was nice enough to make an impression but not enough to last. Poor, sweet, innocent Sayaka, who could (if you were the airhead Makoto Naegi) be called a friend, almost, but not quite.

That Makoto — he really did get on her nerves.

Claiming to know someone, a week in, standing over where her "corpse" would lay the next day? Really, it was kind of pathetic, wasn't it? And for *what*? The bonds these pathetic *ants* had could



hardly be called that. If that was friendship, she had a hundred, a dozen, a thousand of people who knew her —

and, well, she never really thought of him as a friend. To her, he wasn't even an ally.



Lucky for her, Makoto dies shortly before what would be her mastermind trial.

She can't resist laughing at the news. At last — *at last*, it's going to be all eyes on her; only her, not *past* her, or any versions of her that existed only in the minds of strangers, fans, "friends".

The thing about popularity was that you were always bound to be forgotten, you were always going to be replaced. Because someone newer, better, perhaps with a better nose or fairer skin or someone who was just *more than you*, would come along and put an end to what you always wanted. It didn't matter who Sayaka was, nor what she did. They would forget. Even the most dedicated fans would die, some day, and her memory would fade into sea foam and settle into nothingness.

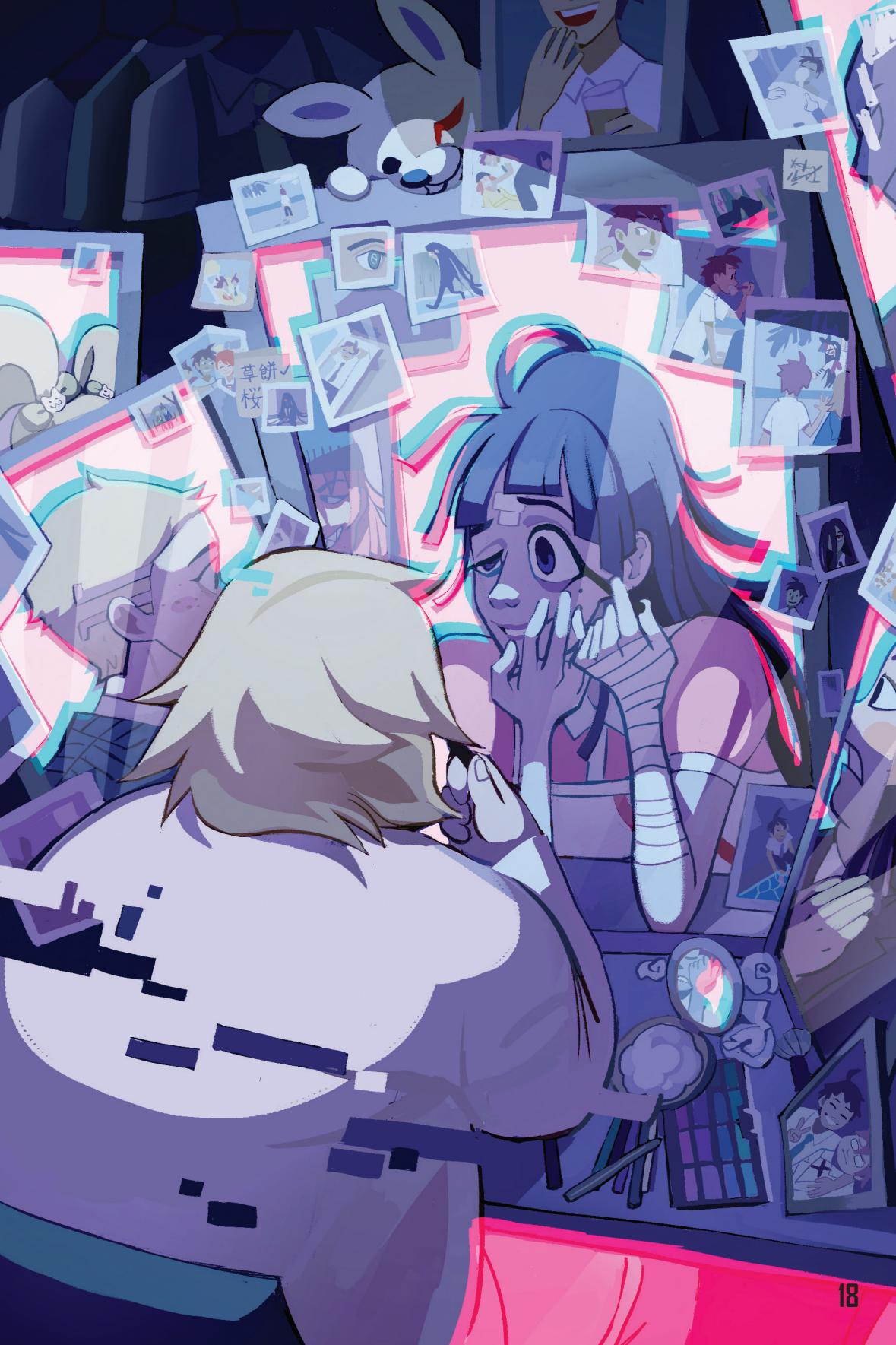


She won't let that happen.

They'll remember her. Hate her, sure. Think a thousand different things for a thousand different reasons — but a killing game of Ultimates, brutal, bloody, and unbelievably horrific, was not something the world just *forgot*. Her name would be spoken in hushed whispers, her face cursed and cursed — but, *but*. She would be remembered.

And the world would finally pay attention to the girl behind the mask. Until the world crashed and burned and turned to stardust, she would remain.

History, Sayaka Maizono thinks, is *waiting for her*.



Metamorphosis

Written by zenonaa, Illustrated by mutie

Daytime sky smiled overhead, its complexion clear, spreading warmth across the stretch of sand where two figures stood. The sea lapped gently, stopping just shy of their feet. Hajime pointed at the flat box in Fuyuhiko's outstretched hand.

"Is that for me?"

"No, I'm just exercising my arm." Fuyuhiko rolled his eyes. "Yeah, it's for you, dumbass."

Hajime's face dimmed for a moment, but lit up again once he unravelled the ribbon and opened the box.

"Kusamochi?" A grin tweaked Hajime's lips. "Wow. Um. Thanks, Fuyuhiko!"

He glanced away, laughing nervously.

"Sorry, I never know what to say when I receive a present."

"Yeah, you're usually the one giving out presents. All you need now's a red coat, a beard and some shitty reindeer," said Fuyuhiko, prompting another embarrassed chuckle from Hajime.

Idle chatter continued as they headed to the hotel. Fuyuhiko bade Hajime a characteristically curt farewell, then stalked off toward the cottages. His lone footfalls thudded across the boardwalk planks, stopping at his door.

A glance at his electronic ID confirmed he was alone. He tucked it back into his pocket, then unlocked the door and entered Byakuya's cottage.

Each cottage was personalized to suit its owner: a chandelier and antique vanity adorned Sonia's cottage, while vehicle organs cluttered Kazuichi's floor. Here? Sticky notes, medical reports and photographs smothered every surface, with one thing in common: Hajime.

A note with Hajime's blood type written on it. A food journal recording everything Hajime ate the previous week. A photograph, on the ceiling, of Hajime performing onstage with Ibuki after Byakuya's death.

Only... Byakuya Togami never set foot on Jabberwock Island.



Fuyuhiko clapped his hands twice in quick succession. Nearby, the sofa shattered into pixels, the mosaic rearranging itself until it solidified into a clothing rack. The bookcase dissolved similarly, regrouping into a storage unit containing bejeweled ribbons, muffin-sized chef hats and shapeless beanies. He basked as reality shifted around him. Yes, their cottages truly did reflect their owners.

As more of his wardrobe materialised around him, Fuyuhiko undressed himself. He shed his clothes, his wig, his contacts, and then finally his identity. Now stood not a person, but an imposter.

They caught a glimpse of their reflection in the vanity mirror. Undisguised, they were as plain as the silhouette of an unknown culprit in a murder mystery visual novel. But unlike a silhouette, the Imposter didn't have a true identity to unveil. Not yet.

The cottage's interior had transformed into a costume room, with only the collages pasted across the walls leftover from its previous state. Photographs of Hajime stared back at the Imposter. Hajime, who befriended everyone. Who had been a being of infinite talents before coming here. Someone who was loved. Valued. Hopeful.

Hajime was somebody. As for the Imposter? With no home, no family, no name of their own? After lurking in the skin of others, living as a nobody all their life, they hungered to wear Hajime's face as their own and become the Ultimate Hope. But first, they needed to complete their research.

Prior observations indicated Mikan would be at the hospital for several hours. They grabbed a nurse uniform off a rack, snatched a choppy wig off its stand, positioned themselves at their vanity and began their metamorphosis.

As the virtual world's mastermind, the Imposter could alter any aspect of their appearance with a snap of their fingers; however, no code could replicate the satisfaction, the intimacy, of layering on new skin. It was akin to baking a cake from scratch rather than purchasing one.

Fuyuhiko, Chiaki and Hajime were by the swimming pool, just as Mikan knew they'd be. She waited until Fuyuhiko left before approaching her target.

"Hi, Mikan!" Hajime greeted. Beside him, Chiaki yawned and waved.

Mikan hunched her shoulders, wiggling her fingers in return. As she gingerly settled onto a poolside chair, she noted the box on Hajime's lap.

"Want some kusamochi?" he asked.

"N-No, thank you... Ah!" Mikan cringed.

"Was that rude?"

"No, it wasn't," Hajime reassured her. Then his smile submerged, a pensive frown bobbing up to take its place.

"Is s-something wrong?"

"It's fine." He shook his head, brow faintly furrowed. "It's just... I ate breakfast with Ibuki yesterday, but later she said she'd been in Titty Typhoon all morning. And I just thanked Fuyuhiko again for the mochi he gave me earlier... but he swore he never gave me any. Either everyone's playing a prank on me or I'm going crazy."

Hajime threw out barks of laughter that betrayed rather than disguised the fear stewing in him. When it consumed him whole, drenching him in delicious, acidic despair, the Imposter would don his skin permanently.

"You're not crazy, Hajime," Chiaki soothed, and Mikan's jaw clenched. Whenever the Imposter bit into Hajime, Chiaki nurtured him back to health. Every light the Imposter snuffed out, Chiaki rekindled. When he meandered in the Imposter's smoke, she led him out.

Chiaki... who the Imposter didn't bring to this island. Who inexplicably arrived with everyone else.

Who should have been dead. Needed to be dead.

As soon as possible.

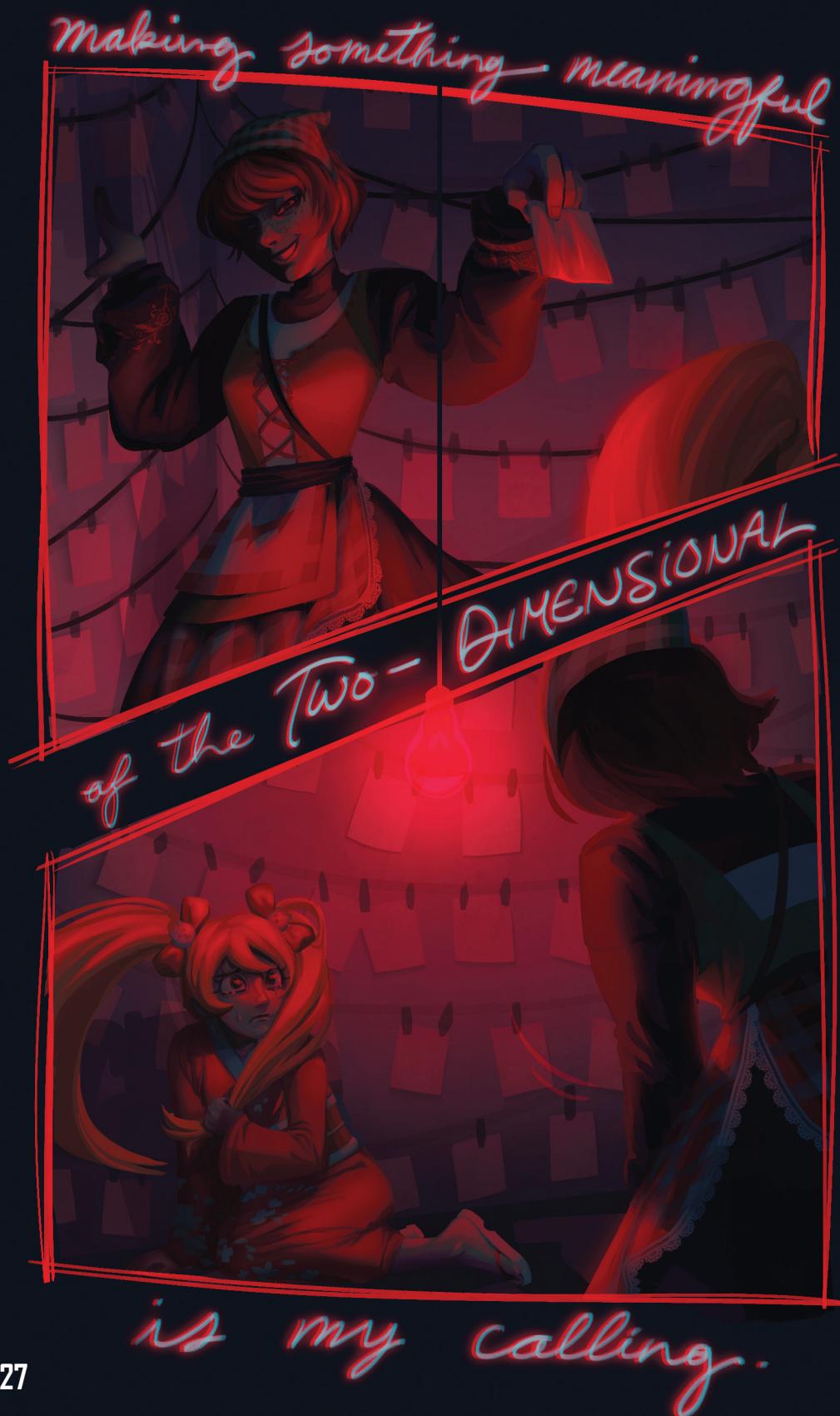


CHAPTER 2



LIFE OF SEA AND PUNISHMENT:
HEAVEN AND HELL





Parabola Beam ♦ AUTHOR
KB20XX ♦ ILLUSTRATOR

APERTURE

There existed a fascinating, nauseated horror within the window of a single photo; an anonymous victim's bloodied fingernails, furrowing channels into undried blood, framed by jagged concrete and exposed metal piping. The suggestion it proffered made the term 'proofs' so, so apt.

So this photo was brought to her dark room, to be pinned alongside her other treasures.

“...Ah, damn.” Mahiru stopped short as she surveyed the walls for an empty space, finding none. “I didn’t think I’d need to start on the floor for another week or so. Maybe the ceiling?”

“Why?” A pale voice entreated, huddled into the corner, muffled behind a kimono sleeve. “This is—it’s way too messed-up, c-c’m'on, enough already—”



Hiyoko had been reluctant at the beginning, to put it lightly. Indeed, she had fallen apart the moment Mahiru had taken her to her dark room, railed against her for the injustice of it all. She hadn't understood how someone she'd looked up to so much could be capable of orchestrating and cataloguing such cruelty with such methodical *care*.

But perhaps, it was that glimmer of the old Mahiru she had known that kept her from turning her back on her.

So even with all of her faults, Hiyoko stayed, even if it were for the sake of sentiments long lost.

The single red bulb hanging overhead warped the shadows of Mahiru's face, critical, vacant, in the moment preceding a hideous smile.

"It's too much? Even for you?" She knelt on her knees in front of her, and Hiyoko froze, didn't even dare to breathe, her eyes huge. Whether she wanted to plunge into Mahiru's arms, anchor herself against the one solid pillar of support she'd had, or back into the wall and pray for it to absorb her was anyone's guess. "But you're hardly innocent yourself—it's impossible not to see the way you act out. Did you think I didn't know?" Mahiru scolded her kindly, with the matter-of-fact air of a long-suffering parent.

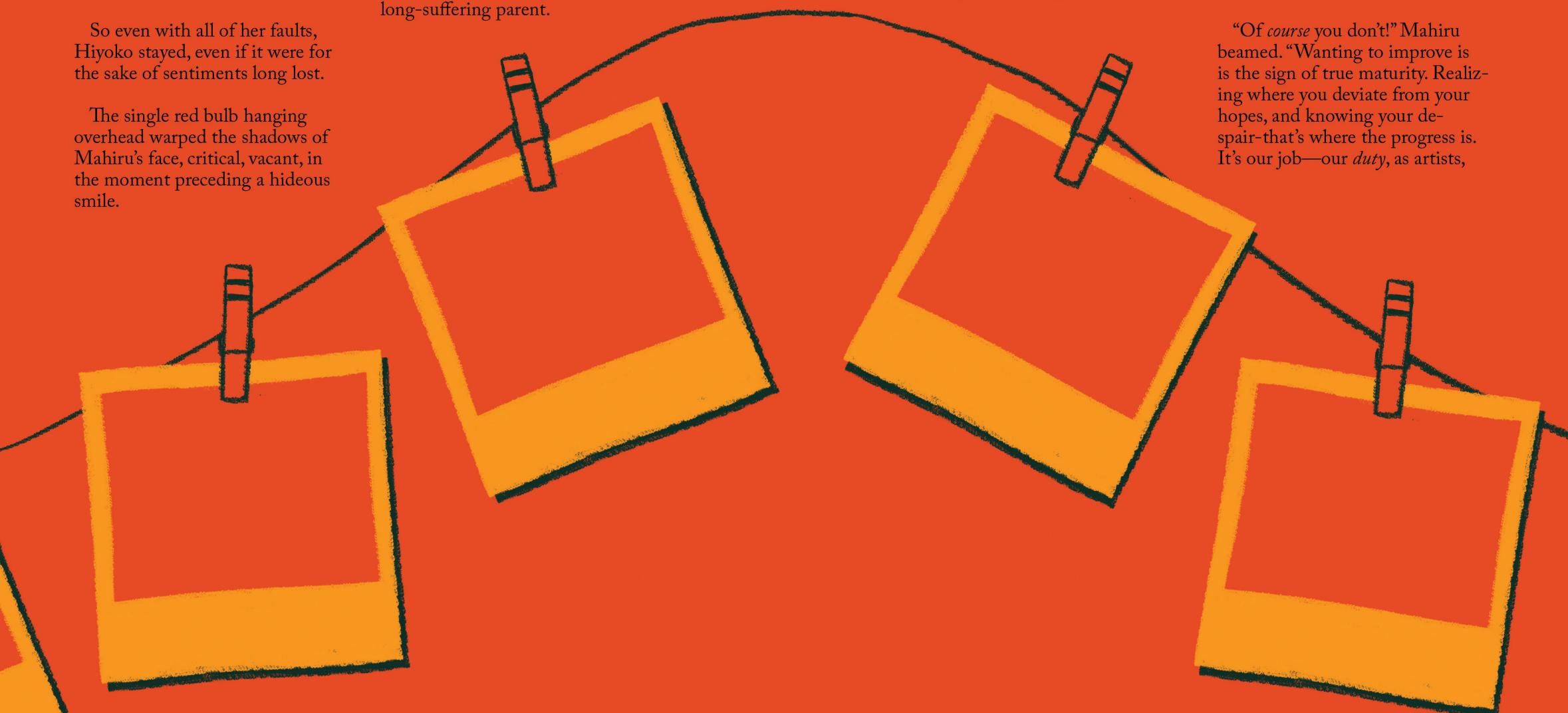
She touched a hand to her feverish cheek. The soft skin beneath her eyes as she stroked a thumb against an errant tear was puffy and swollen. Hiyoko flinched, then hesitantly drooped into her palm.

"There there, good girl. You know what...? Even if you're a bully, you're still a child. And even if you know that you can get away with anything at your age, I think you're smart enough to realize that this is pointless. If no one likes you already, then acting out like you do

won't help. Unless ... you actually believe that this immaturity is charming in some way? Working the *tsundere* angle? Are you happy with that? An archetype so two-dimensional that some boy surrounds himself with it in his room with the lights off, with his stained sweatpants—"

"S-Stop! Stop stop, ew—" Hiyoko hiccuped, face scrunching with a disgusted shudder. "—I don't wanna! I'll be good for real—"

"Of course you don't!" Mahiru beamed. "Wanting to improve is the sign of true maturity. Realizing where you deviate from your hopes, and knowing your despair—that's where the progress is. It's our job—our *duty*, as artists,



to recognize this boon."

Mahiru opened her arms to her, a watery smile curling her lips. One more push.

"Oh, Hiyoko ... I'm so proud of you. So proud to know you."

The younger girl collapsed into her like a limp doll. As she wept, Mahiru stroked her hair, embraced her in earnest. She rocked her in her arms, pressed her lips to the crown of her head as it went on, and on, peeking at her watch from behind Hiyoko's shoulders.

"We're...a bit beyond creating art that is beautiful, easily consumed, you know...? It's pleasant to look at, to those that actually look. But we can't trust everyone in the world to look for the good. *That's* why, Hiyoko. Because people look for something to criticize. You know that—I knew you did. We'll

show them something unforgettable."

Hiyoko clung, absorbing each droplet of praise like a fish gasping against sand.

"Y-You'll help...? You'll still—" Hiyoko raised her eyes, basking in Mahiru's fond smile, "—e-even, the way I am now—am I still—?"

"Especially as you are now." Mahiru flourished her latest acquisition between her fingers, turned it side to side. "See? Making something meaningful out of the two-dimensional is my calling. I'll take your picture, too." She held up her camera, eyes alight, "May I... commemorate this moment? Your first smile, on the path to a better self?"

Hiyoko nodded, and the camera flashed.

...Your first smile, embracing despair.



Your first smile, embracing despair.





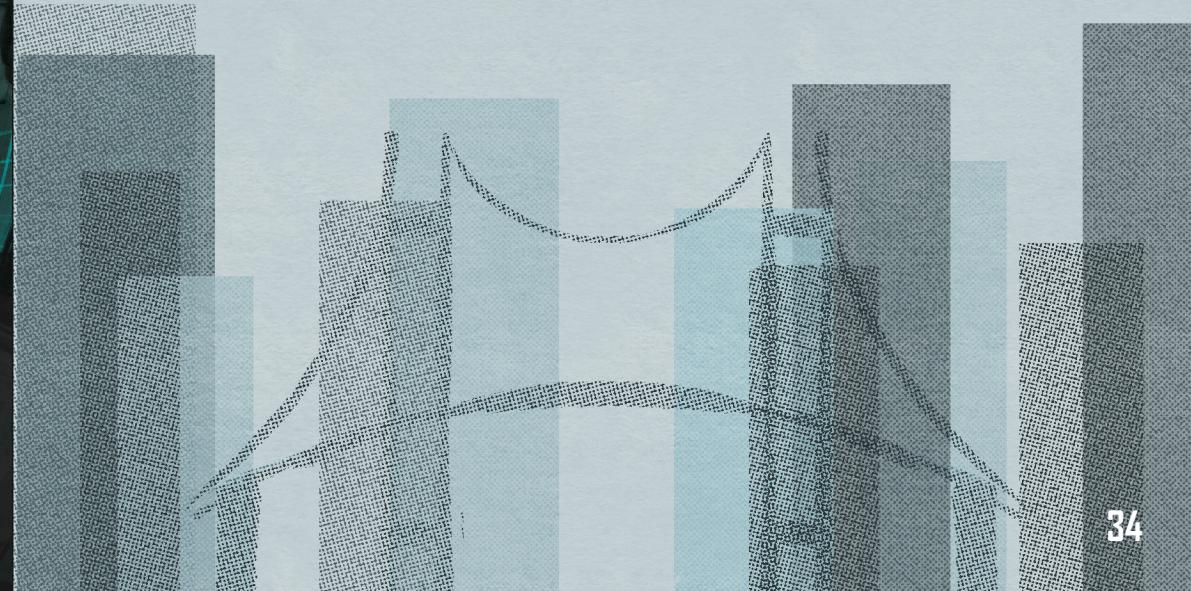
FOR EVERYONE BUT YOU

Written by wrenkos, Illustrated by rin

Kirumi Tojo is falling apart.

Or, to put it more bluntly — she is being *pulled apart*. It's a simple mess, really, but one that would not be such a hassle if it weren't for the constant pulling of her strings and chatter in her ears as her fellow survivors shoot accusations back and forth and to and fro.

Really, the fact that it's taken this long for her patience to dwindle is a shock even to her. Hands fold behind her back as she takes a breath as all eyes fix on her — Kaede, Tsumugi, Gonta, Kaito. A welcome silence (for her, anyways) settles over the room. Kaede breaks it first.





"Are you the mastermind, Kirumi?"

"It's plain to see," Tsumugi says quietly, hands clasped over her chest, "Kirumi isn't — well, she plainly isn't the sort of person to do something so... *horrible*. I mean, she's always there for everyone —"

"Yes," Kirumi echoes, the corners of her lips twitching upwards, "This is for everyone."

"It's, uh." Kaito bawks in a way that makes her skin crawl. "It's what?"

"This is for everyone," she repeats, biting down the urge to throw an insult his way. "I am doing this for everyone. Not just you or the fallen — society as a whole. Every person on earth. Don't you understand? Murder. Lies. Betrayal. Humans only care for money, for fame, for *glory*, and those in charge have their head in the clouds. They think they're *untouchable*."

She clears her throat.

"What comes to mind when you first think of a killing game? How horrible. How bloody. How horrifying. How *cruel*. It is all of that and more — but not something people will simply *look away* from. It is unfortunate I had to involve all of you in this, but Ultimates, blessed students who have been put on a pedestal... their deaths will not be in vain. You will bring change."

"I believe the term is a wake-up call," the words are spoken calmly, as if uttered over a cup of tea. With flowers and roses, perhaps, but she had long since been left with only thorns. "You all have grown, have you not? Through hardships you have prevailed, you have changed for the better. It is time for the rest of humanity to realize they are just people, ordinary and puny and pathetic. They have to realize — the world must be shaken. I am nothing more merely a catalyst, and nothing more."

"Gonta thinks that this is just mean to—"

Her gaze turns to a glare as she turns, the spider's web finally snapping.

"Then have you learned *nothing*?"

Gonta takes a sharp inhale. Kirumi's hand trembles with fury. She forces it to still.

"My apologies." The words are robotic.

"I lost my temper for a moment."

Kaede's voice shakes, ever so slightly. "You can't... you can't just..."

"Can't what, Kaede?" Her voice betrays her; one tiny drop of anger slips in. Then another joins the first, then two more arrive, and her voice is louder than she intends as the dam holding her emotions breaks. "Can't *see the truth*? The truth is that people lie. People cheat. People are rather ugly, but this is for everyone. The *better* of everyone, Kaede, don't you get it?"

Kaito grits his teeth, "No, Kirumi, this really isn't your best idea—"

"*Be silent!*" Her voice rises, her hands slam down at the podium and for a moment she wishes it would break to a thousand pieces. "It is not I who is wicked, it is you all! Why can't you *see*? Must I put two and two together for you like toddlers, connect the dots and hold your sweaty, grimy hands the entire way? This is for the best. This is for everyone! I would think you would agree. It seems my standards must be too high — is there nothing that goes through these thick heads of yours? The truth seems to fall short for you!"

Why—" her voice breaks for just a moment, her gaze flickering before it returns. "Why don't you just *understand* what I am trying to do?!"

"You're out of your mind—"

"And it seems I put too much faith in you!" Her voice comes with a laugh, cruel and bitter. "Your blind optimism will not get you anywhere. You're a pathetic, pathetic man, Kaito — you act so strong, so brave, so *mighty*, but you have failed to realize the real world is not so *kind*."

No, she realizes as an idea takes root, *she* is not so kind.

"Disappointing." Her voice is eerie still as she collects herself once again. "Disappointing, the lot of you."

"K-Kirumi? What are—"

"Monokuma," the maid's voice is commanding, authoritative, "Clean up this trash for me, would you?"

"W-We can—"

She dusts off her skirt as the sound of metal and machinery grows louder and louder.

"We cannot, Tsumugi. For if you do not believe in *me*, I, in turn, will not believe in *you*."

Clang.

CHAPTER 3

A NEXT GENERATION LEGEND!

TRAPPED FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE











LANGUID WORLD DREAMS OF APOLOGIES







SWARM OVER ALL

Written by kibasniper, Illustrated by ghoulg1rl

"Gonta," Kokichi hisses, his usual snarky countenance replaced with a cheek-sagging scowl, "you're the mastermind."

"What?" Gonta shrieks, jerking away from his podium. His glasses slide down to the tip of his nose, and he sputters, "You-! But-! Why-?"

Kirumi clears her throat. "Kokichi, you haven't presented—"

"Just wait a second," Kokichi snaps. He checks his fingernails, refusing to meet Gonta's glare. "You pulled the wool over my eyes by acting like my personal stooge. Pretty clever."

"Gonta is the true trickster?" Angie exclaims, clasped hands crowning her head.

Sweat trickles down Gonta's cheeks, skin flushing scarlet. "N-no! That's pr-preposterous!"

"I agree. Give us your reasoning, Kokichi," Kirumi orders.

"I doubly agree! Gonta has never lied, unlike you." Angie frowns at Kokichi. "He was always a loyal member of my student council, remember?"

Gonta nods feverishly, lips twitching upwards. "Yes, yes! See? They believe me! Why won't you, Kokichi?" His voice pitches, catching Kirumi off guard when he interjects. "Am I really nothing to you?" Gonta's teeth clench, his smile not quite reaching his eyes. "Aren't we friends, Kokichi?"

Kokichi peers at the empty podiums around him. Memories of the dead students flicker in his head. He focuses on the podium where Maki once stood proud. Her death had been the reason for the final trial. A faint smirk paints itself on his pale face as he meets Gonta's narrowed gaze.

"Sure, Gonta! We're such good pals, but I have to ask something pretty cruel. Isn't it kind of weird how you started talking differently?" Kokichi wonders, gripping his chin. "I mean, as your best buddy in the world, it's my sworn duty to notice when you do something odd like that."

Gonta feels like a squashed worm. He claps his hand over his mouth, eyes wide. Kirumi snaps to attention. Angie yelps as Gonta tugs through his hair, then drags his fingers down his cheeks, huffing out sharp gasps.

Time ticks on, the seconds fluttering faster than a butterfly's wings. Gonta's mouth twists upwards in a sneer, pupils dilating. He cracks his neck, a peal of snickers rising up from the back of his throat, then he groans through clenched teeth. He lifts his gaze to the ceiling, a sigh hissing out of him and filling the entire trial room.

"Did you know that black widows like to hide in plain sight before they strike?" he murmurs, his shoulders unevenly slackening.

Kokichi scoffs. "What are you-?" He flinches as a black widow slips out of Gonta's breast pocket and crawls along his sleeve. It taps a vein pulsing under his skin with a curious appendage before skittering to the center of his calloused palm.

"Even with their obvious markings, they go unnoticed by their prey until it's far too late for them."

Gonta traces his thumb across the spider, smiling like an innocent child.

Kokichi drags in a breath. "Gonta, you-"

"But even if you're filled with venom, lowering your guard guarantees death," he snarls, gouging through the arachnid. Visceral fluids spread along the crevices of his hand.

He holds out the carcass to his head. All traces of his gentle demeanor - which had been as saccharine as his honey jars - shatter when the monster smashes through his cocoon.

Angie screams when the swarm emerges from his thick curls. Flies and wasps scramble around his head. Dragonflies flap their wings in the heavy, stagnant air. Ants and tarantulas march to the spider's corpse to pilfer the spoils.

"It took five trials for you fools to realize it was me," he jeers, a dragonfly shadowing his wicked expression, and he reaches up to caress its wings. A centipede crawls across his knuckles, its brethren scattering along the podium. "As Kokichi deduced, I pulled the wool over your eyes!" He cackles. "Then again, you were already as blind as troglobionts!"

Kirumi clutches her jaw. Angie fiddles with her pearls, speechless. Revulsion and horror churns in their stomachs as the insects charge towards them.

"Climbing a mountain of corpses led you to the summit, to Gonta Gokuhara!" he booms, the shine in his irises reflecting the fire beetles rising from the seams in his suit. "What brought you here, pushing others out of your way?" The insects scatter across his body and face, crawling and racing over each other as they thread through his hair and clothes, "shows you're as bloodthirsty as I am!"

Gonta erupts in hysterics. Kokichi works his stiff jaw, dying to retort - but as the insects scurry up his pants and sink their teeth into his skin, he shrieks his first, honest wail.



CHAPTER 5

100 VOYAGES IN THE NAME OF DESPAIR



Theatre of Cruelty

Written by glownary, Illustrated by Sabimilia

The suckerpunch was a nice touch, Kaito thinks, mentally congratulating himself over the improvised blow. The performance had given their act more credibility. He'd been immensely relieved—not that he'd ever admit it—to see his partner play along without batting an eye.

He enters the boys' bathroom to find his co-star hunched in front of the mirror, gingerly pressing a finger to the fresh bruise spreading across his cheek.

"Admiring the gift I gave you?" Kaito taunts, shutting the door shut behind him. The other man's gaze trails down the mirror to Kaito's hand, and Kaito takes some pride in the way it lingers at the discoloration of his knuckles.

Kokichi spins on his heel and leans back against the sink, utterly unfazed. "Of course! Really brings out my eyes, don'tcha think?"

An annoyed huff escapes from between Kaito's teeth.

"C'mon, Kaito, you know I'm a professional. No hard feelings in showbiz." Taking a cursory glance at his Monopad, Kokichi steps into the utility stall, indicating that nobody was nearby. "You're doing great, by the way."

Kaito blinks in surprise at the oddly genuine compliment. "I... really?"

"Mhm. They love you—you can see it in their eyes." Kokichi elbows open the door to the hidden hallway with a wink. "But not as much as they hate me."

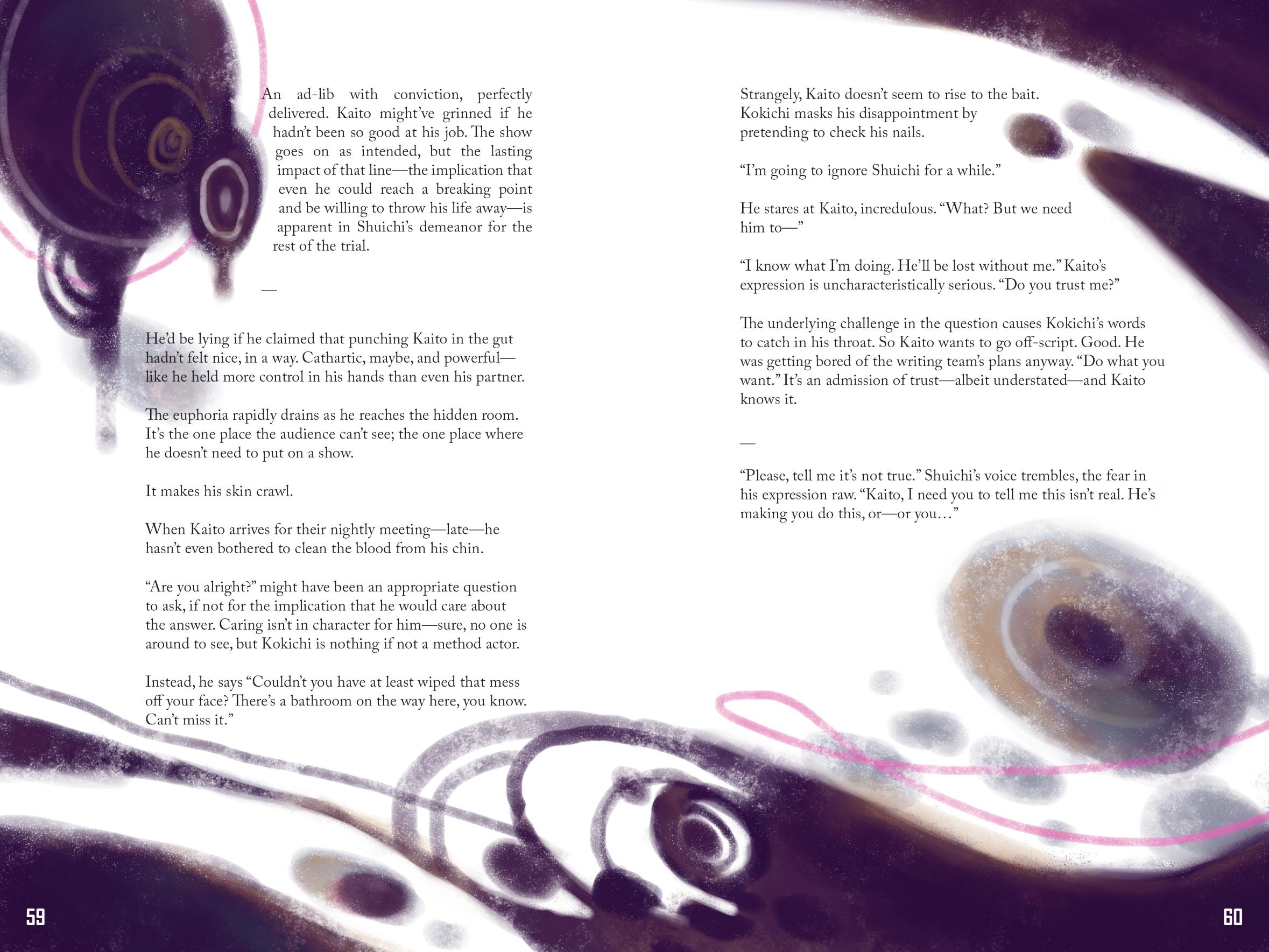
**" Well then...
the culprit is Gonta. "**

For one suffocating moment, the room is unnaturally quiet. Tension pools, stretches and inevitably snaps. Everyone scrambles to fill the silence all at once—shouting over each other, muttering exclamations of surprise, and hurling accusations of guilt alike. Kaito escalates the drama with each line; his voice roaring progressively louder as he blindly defends Gonta and insists that Shuichi agree.

He watches attentively as Kokichi screams at Gonta across the trial room, waiting for the signal. Kokichi strums his fingers against the podium: once, twice, three times. Kaito springs into action at the cue, his voice booming as he demands Kokichi to stop.

Adrenaline pumps through his veins. Nothing in Danganronpa was quite as intoxicating as a trial. The dispute comes to a crescendo—

"I don't want to survive if it means I have to stoop to your level."



An ad-lib with conviction, perfectly delivered. Kaito might've grinned if he hadn't been so good at his job. The show goes on as intended, but the lasting impact of that line—the implication that even he could reach a breaking point and be willing to throw his life away—is apparent in Shuichi's demeanor for the rest of the trial.

He'd be lying if he claimed that punching Kaito in the gut hadn't felt nice, in a way. Cathartic, maybe, and powerful—like he held more control in his hands than even his partner.

The euphoria rapidly drains as he reaches the hidden room. It's the one place the audience can't see; the one place where he doesn't need to put on a show.

It makes his skin crawl.

When Kaito arrives for their nightly meeting—late—he hasn't even bothered to clean the blood from his chin.

“Are you alright?” might have been an appropriate question to ask, if not for the implication that he would care about the answer. Caring isn't in character for him—sure, no one is around to see, but Kokichi is nothing if not a method actor.

Instead, he says “Couldn't you have at least wiped that mess off your face? There's a bathroom on the way here, you know. Can't miss it.”

Strangely, Kaito doesn't seem to rise to the bait. Kokichi masks his disappointment by pretending to check his nails.

“I'm going to ignore Shuichi for a while.”

He stares at Kaito, incredulous. “What? But we need him to—”

“I know what I'm doing. He'll be lost without me.” Kaito's expression is uncharacteristically serious. “Do you trust me?”

The underlying challenge in the question causes Kokichi's words to catch in his throat. So Kaito wants to go off-script. Good. He was getting bored of the writing team's plans anyway. “Do what you want.” It's an admission of trust—albeit understated—and Kaito knows it.

“Please, tell me it's not true.” Shuichi's voice trembles, the fear in his expression raw. “Kaito, I need you to tell me this isn't real. He's making you do this, or—or you...”

The words trail off as he struggles to find another explanation. Anything but the truth.

Kokichi leans forward against the podium, a sardonic grin stretched impossibly wide on his cheeks. "Calling out for your hero already, detective?"

The pure despair in Shuichi's eyes is indescribable. Abandoning the original script had beyond paid off.

Kaito releases a sigh of mock frustration.

"C'mon, sidekick, I thought you were done hiding from the truth. You've got the masterminds right in front of you—how do you think Kaede would feel if she could hear you now?"

Reaching for a hat he hasn't worn in weeks, there's nothing left for Shuichi to hide behind. Thirty million eyes are on him as he breaks to pieces.





glownary ♡ AUTHOR

Mukuro was a soldier before she was human—and before she was a soldier, she was Junko's sister.

Any order Junko gave, she would follow. Not blindly, no; Mukuro knew the consequences of her actions. She would endure any lashing, savor the heat of any branding, clutch the sun itself within her searing mouth—if Junko asked it of her.

She would gladly die if it would make Junko happy.

And she planned to. Junko created the killing game to enjoy the despair of watching her most treasured classmates tear each other to shreds. Best of all, she had wanted *Mukuro* to be an active participant. Nothing else she had done before at Junko's behest could compare to such an honor. The mere thought of it spurred Mukuro to work even more diligently.

She shivered as she imagined what kind of expression Junko would make upon witnessing her demise.

It was her own dedication that led her to discover the spears. Junko hadn't ordered her to enter the basement, but she felt an instinctual urge that she couldn't ignore. She needed to check.

Everything needed to be perfect.

As she performed her final survey of the school grounds, she came face-to-face with a setup Junko hadn't informed her of: the Spears of Gungnir, attached to a structure that was evidently meant to stab them upwards through the floorboards—in the exact spot Junko had instructed her to stand.

The intention was clear. Junko was going to use her death as an example for the other students.

Mukuro serenely envisioned how the scene was meant to play out. The spears would tear through her all at once, as if she were nothing more than a piece of meat. They would puncture her vital organs, fill her lungs with blood, and leave her lifeless in an instant—an utterly underwhelming demise in comparison to the extravagant fate the killers would meet.

Sympathy pierced her heart. To have earned herself such an unremarkable end ... what an awful sister she was. Being Junko's obedient little pawn—carrying out her every whim without question—wasn't what her sister wanted from her at all. How dull it must have been; it was no wonder that the Ultimate Despair had

grown so bored. There had to be something she could do, something that could make it up to Junko ... perhaps she could take her own life in a display of fealty ...? No, that sort of death would hardly be entertaining.

Tracing two fingertips along the spear blades, Mukuro's eyes lit up as she found her answer. How had she not realized it sooner—what greater despair could she offer her sister than betrayal? For a mere pawn to stab her queen in the back, preventing Junko from ever seeing her plans to fruition—there was no sweeter anguish she could inflict than that.

With newfound purpose, Mukuro extracted the spears from their mechanism one by one, clutching them to her chest. Her pulse raced as she quickly made her way to the monitor room. The cameras wouldn't be on until the next day, she knew.

She opened the door, careful to hold the weapons steady. Junko stood at the desk, poring over the school records, her back exposed.

Even Junko's impressive reflexes were no match for the Ultimate Soldier. All she could manage in the split second before the first spear tore through her body was to turn and face Mukuro with a soundless gasp, eyes wide and

spiraling. Her initial reaction was incomprehensible, every possible motion making itself known on her features: shock, rage, fear ... excitement.

"I would do anything for you," Mukuro whispered, the second spear puncturing her sister's lungs. Her heart twisted as Junko howled hideous, soul-piercing laughter, blood spraying from her mouth and dripping down her chin.

It was so much slower, so much more *painful* than the contraption Junko had prepared. She made sure to save the killing blow for last, driving the final spear into Junko's heart with a visceral squelch.

The moment she let go, Junko's corpse collapsed to the ground, the swirling ecstasy and despair in her eyes reflected in Mukuro's own.

Stepping over Junko's body, she approached the blood-spattered desk, its surface littered with photographs that depicted her beloved classmates at various school events. Mukuro refocused on the game's preparations, suppressing the pang in her chest at the sight of their smiles.

Everything needed to be perfect. She had one chance to carry out her sister's vision, and she needed to make it count—after all, she had *crowned herself despair in Junko's honor*.



CHAPTER 6

GOODBYE ULTIMATE
ACADEMY OF DESPAIR



DANGANRONPA DAILY

THRILLS • CHILLS • KILLS • THRILLS • CHILLS • KILLS

Author: Parabola Beam

Illustrator: Yuelight

MENS REA

Genocide Jack case revisited, transferred to prodigious Kyoko Kirigiri following emergence of new evidence.



In a press release following the case transfer, Kirigiri declined official comment, but did offer reassurances to skeptics: "The best thing you can do is to keep from obstructing the process. Don't blow it with a media frenzy and I'll have your results in due time."

The dour line of her mouth warped itself around her thumbnail, grasping for another chunk of skin to chew to the raw. Kyoko knew that Toko would not ask for, nor want, a bandage, a cup of water, or an ounce of pity. They both knew what she was, why she kept coming back to a claustrophobic but otherwise nigh-featureless box of a room, and why Kyoko had to cut the cameras every time.

With her backside propped against the opposite side of the table, Kyoko observed from over her shoulder as Toko peeled at the puffy skin on her index finger. Her usual self-soothing, albeit mutilating, gesture, performed with alarming rigor, tonight for their after-hours rendezvous.

"...Bad night?"

Toko scowled, and Kyoko raised an eyebrow, prompting.

(...Her sympathy. Her kindness.)

"Y-You're not my f-friend."

"I'm well aware."

The silence deafens. Toko feels the weight of her stare in every pregnant pause and tries to hate the way she manages to look so blindingly virtuous, even now, but the room is as ugly as she is poised: stale off-white plaster walls and suffocating artificial lighting, buzzing from either a cheap bulb or another hapless fly trying to avoid joining its fat brethren lifelessly wedged in the cranny.

For a lucid moment, she sees herself in its corpse. Wedged into a corner of her own personal hell. Ugly. Inconsequential. Almost unseen.

Almost.

But in much the same way a dead insect does not care to be seen, Toko could do without Kyoko's scrutiny, or interest.

"I don't blame you. If you're going to kill someone, you might as well make it personal."

Toko's immediate response is a laugh; a brittle bark, like she can't even stand the taste of it in her mouth, but for the first time that evening, she looks Kyoko in the eyes.

"It better be personal. I'd rather die to someone who hated me than to someone who didn't give a damn either way...!"

"That so...? I think you're full of it, Fukawa. I think you'd die for any cause, lost or righteous, as long as it fit whatever romanticized notion you're imagining. You could die for anyone so long as they give you a crumb of attention." The pause stretches, Kyoko letting its illumination settle like a noose.

"...I think you'd even die for me."

"A-As if."



During the court hearing for case transfer on the grounds of shocking malpractice by a court officer, Kirigiri gave the following comment: "I can understand the intent, the thought process behind needing crooked methods to catch crooked people. But we can't sink to their level. Not really."



When pressed for an update, Kirigiri assured the families of those involved: "I am proceeding with a surgeon's hand. Thank you for your patience."

Why did she have to look at her like that? Like she could almost understand...!

That first night Kyoko had taken her in, she'd held the discarded and found-again pair of scissors against the purse of her own lips, dragged her tongue along the blade.

"...You bled him like a pig. As I thought."

...Why did Kyoko's guesses sound so much more like promises?

The table quaked as his photo, a bloody ocean of viscera, slammed down in front of her, the world breaking down around her.

Only Kyoko knew of the struggle to contain "Jack" that followed, and as calmly as she spoke of it in retrospect, the bandages around her extremities told the story she wouldn't.

"Maybe it's guilt. The remorse shown to a victim after death...even if the killer is

the type to collect tokens of their prey. But maybe that's what's owed. A dowry for perverted unions. A tithe to a black widow."

A crooked slant curled Kyoko's lips as her fingers glanced over Toko's holster in one swift motion, drawing and poising the blade of the scissors beneath her chin, tilted her wayward gaze home.

"They kill their partners once they're finished with them. But you're just grateful I'm in the market for one, aren't you." Kyouko intoned, her eyes unreadable. "For a game...with a little more breathing room than these liaisons of ours."

As inevitable as either blade of the shears, their partnership was sealed.

An empty hope, that there would always be a need, seemed determined to unspindle their web.

Kyoko needed an accomplice. It didn't really matter who it was, so long as it was one that was sufficiently malleable to suggestion, eager to take orders and prove their worth, and able to get away with murder - in the eyes of any and every other detective aside from herself.

And of course, had to be so, utterly, beneath her that no one would suspect their partnership.

Toko Fukawa fit all of her criteria too neatly, and it was almost enough to garner her respect.

But not quite.





75



76



THE FOOL

zenonaa ♡ AUTHOR
Sel ♡ ILLUSTRATOR

Threads of smoke wound out from the incense in the headmaster's office, lights dimmed, real moody.

"I love how smoke looks," remarked Yasuhiro, his hand hovering over a chess piece.

Opposite him, Jin maintained a poker face.

"I think," Yasuhiro dragged his bishop to E6, "I got hooked after the third house fire."

After a four hour train ride, Yasuhiro waited outside his father's new place until the lights switched off. Everyone assumed his cigarette birthed the fire again. Neither Yasuhiro nor his mother cried at the funeral.

"Blanking me again, huh?" chided Yasuhiro. Jin still wouldn't humour him, wouldn't feed the fire Yasuhiro was kindling. "You're so cold, Mister Principal... just like my dad."

While Jin's pieces flailed in vain like a mafia leader's daughter drowning in a bathtub, Yasuhiro's army closed in. Yasuhiro pouted.

"Ah, he wasn't all bad. The guy donated his organs." He flourished

his rook, then winked. "They earned me nearly four billion, so he wasn't completely worthless! But let's keep that part between us, 'right?'

Jin just stared at the board. His king staggered in its death throes, until—

"Checkmate!" Yasuhiro announced. "The score's what, six-one now? Too easy!" He checked his wristwatch and gasped. "Lunchtime already? Want anything?"

As sore a loser as ever, Jin sulked silently. Yasuhiro stood up, humming. Then he kicked Jin's head, making him topple over sideways. A broken crystal ball crunched underneath his rotting corpse. Continuing to hum, Yasuhiro fixed his collar and replaced his leer with a triumphant jester's grin.

"Organ donor suits you too, Mister Principal."



TENDERIZE



Akane's incisors tore into the meat as if she was a starving hyena. She gnawed through the chewy texture, savoring faint hints of salt within the juicy beef. Her lips smacked together, and the sigh she huffed out mingled with satisfaction. The drool wetting her lips, the twitching of her nose, the cold skewer numbing her calloused palm while heat coursed through her body, reminded her of victory.



Kazuichi's body slumped over his podium. The rosy liquid staining the center of his jumpsuit provided the perfect sauce.

Sonia screamed and raked her fingernails into her powdered cheeks. She thrust her foot backwards, brows knitting together. She echoed his name until her vocal chords clenched and choked her.

"One down," Akane sneered, stuffing the rest of the meat bun into her mouth, "and three to go."

Hajime gasped. His tanned cheeks paled in the blink of an eye. He snatched the edges of his podium, rasping, "What the hell did you do?"

Akane's lip curled in response. She ran her tongue over her teeth, debris crashing around them as the crumbling virtual world became the backdrop for her final battle.

"Answer me!" Hajime bellowed, his pupils constricting.

"Man, you guys won't give me a minute to relish the flavor," Akane jeered, nibbling her lip. The meat buns, neatly crafted in the images of her opponents, wafted a strong, hearty scent that made her drool flow faster.



Fuyuhiko shook his fist, snapping, "Relish what? Acting like a dumbass the whole time only to flip on us?" He stole a glance at Kazuichi's body and swallowed his fear. "I mean, all he did was get it wrong, and he...just..."

Akane followed his gaze and fiddled with her saliva-slathered skewer. The remaining rabble had faced no consequences for their mistakes and missteps throughout the game. They were carried by her strongest opponent, who corrected each of their fallacies during the trials. The weak had no choice but to battle her mysteries with their own power, unlike the one who proved his mettle.

She hardly pitied Kazuichi. In her climactic finale, the loser faced swift, merciless annihilation.

"Surviving to the endgame doesn't guarantee you'll live," she remarked, spearing her skewer into her podium and



splintering the wood. "Those dead chumps were appetizers, but now...we're at the main course. 'Sides, you've been doing this all along. Just didn't realize it, huh?"

She bared her fangs, their terror pumping adrenaline through her bloodstream. Her steel gray eyes memorized the fear pooling in their irises. Her stomach growled for nourishment, her trigger-finger itching to fire. Everything she endured was for this brawl.

"Among you all—" She beamed at Hajime, who hunched his back like a prowling jaguar. "-even with other fighters on the mat, you're the cream of the crop, Hajime." She cracked her knuckles, the sound of popping bones louder than the electricity sizzling in the crumbling environment. "You impressed me. Through all the cases, you shot through lies and slashed through refutations." She shuddered. "Feeling that firsthand, oh, I can't wait to see what you got." Her tongue flicked across her upper lip. "With all those victories under your belt, I bet you can't wait to see what I got, too. We're kind of alike, ya know?"



Hajime flinched, briefly relinquishing his poise. Glancing at his hands, he winced as they trembled. He remembered triumphing over the culprits and their subsequent executions, their death throes everyone's victory chime.

Slowly, he drew his fingers into his palms and sucked in a shaky breath. "I'm nothing like you," Hajime hissed back.

"You've been doing everything I'm doing. The only difference is..." Akane spread her middle and ring fingers to Sonia and Fuyuhiko. "...it's everyone against me. Try not to mouth off like that moronic mechanic unless you have a death wish."

Fuyuhiko barked out disingenuous threats. Sonia clasped her hands in front of her neck, teeth gritting and jaw tightening. But Akane focused solely on Hajime, salivating, needing to sink her teeth into him as he glared at her with enough intensity to set her ablaze like a pig on a spit.



"Let's get back to the brawl! I got questions, and you got answers. Wrong ones mean only one thing," Akane snarled, veins throbbing in her tight fists. "If you can't solve my mysteries, then you're as good as dead! C'mon, feed me!"

Laughter ripped free from the back of her throat. She craved the carnal taste, her entire being yearning for the rush of her final battle. As they shivered under the fake sunlight filtering in through coding, Akane launched her furious flurry of attacks, her stomach and muscles aching for more.



WRITTEN BY KIBASNIPER, ILLUSTRATED BY ZUBATZO





XIII. EPILOGUE MONOKUMA THEATER BREAK

"Congratulations! Now,
you'll all be like me!"





THE ULTIMATE PUNISHMENT AWAITS.



ART
BY
KIRVIA

I AM THE MASTERMIND!

Danganronpa Fanzine

I AM THE MASTERMIND! DANGANRONPA FANZINE PRESENTS "EXECUTION GRAND FINALE" MODDED BY SELUNIUM KB20XX KIRVIA GLOWNARY
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PG-13
Parental Content
Not on adult content
Character spoilers
Violence
Kidding/Comedy



12.25.20

#MASTERMINDZINE



WOULD ANYONE HERE
THREE D
90

KYOKO KIRIGIRI

— CHARM

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CHIAKI NANAMI

— 3D CHARM

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CHIHIRO FUJISAKI

— CHARM

GG



93

RANTARO AMAMI

— GLOW IN THE DARK STICKER

GG



— KAITO MOMOTA

STAR BUTTON

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94

MAKOTO NAEGI & IBUKI MIODA

— STICKER SHEET —

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KOKICHI OUMA
— GOLD FRAME CHARM —

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JUNKO ENOSHIMA
HOPE'S PEAK ID —
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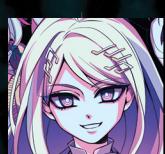
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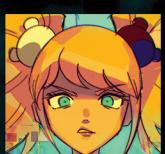
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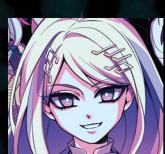
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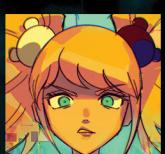
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Twitter: aryllins
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THANK YOU!



toki
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Twitter: tuchany_



khee
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Twitter: cactuskhee
Tumblr: cactuskhee



Elaine
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Twitter: cryingpossibly
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remono
Instagram: remonoart
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Yuelight
Instagram: _yuelight
Twitter: _yuelight



ciatoru
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poof
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Seluniii
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Twitter: seluniiii



Crystalrina
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I am the MASTERMIND!
mastermindzine.corrd.co
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CuriousCat: MASTERMINDzine



I am the MASTERMIND! is a Danganronpa fanzine starring characters from Trigger Happy Havoc, Super Danganronpa 2, and V3: Killing Harmony as masterminds of their own killing games!

IAMMI is incredibly grateful to have hosted 57 fantastic contributors in this project. Through everyone's hard work, ambition, and ingenuity, we were able to make the impossible possible!

Mountains of love were poured into every detail of this zine - from lore, to designs, to marketing - and we are so, so proud to be able to showcase the full project for all of you at last.

A big thank you to everyone who has bought our zine! Your enthusiastic support has fostered this project's success from start to finish, and we sincerely hope you had as much fun consuming mastermind content as we did creating it.

Until next time! Upupupu...

**I AM THE
MASTERMIND**
Danganronpa Fanzine